

CLIENT: AKC Puppy Training Pads

PRODUCT/SERVICE COMPANY

Market situation:

- I was not able to find liable information to determine where AKC ranks and if sales are increasing. However, after researching some of the other companies compared to AKC, I conclude that sales are definitely not at a spiked increase. The other companies are more prominent in the market and AKC is not heard of often.
- It seems that AKC's positioning strategy is to make the consumer feel they are a trustworthy brand of puppy pads. This is revealed through their very clean-cut packaging with the AKC logo on the front. It could be said that AKC wants people to associate the puppy pads with the historical name when they buy the brand.
- The only forms of marketing communications I found with this product were online advertisements, an online coupon and e-commerce websites selling the product.
- According to Amazon.com reviews, I found that the puppy pads benefits are that they eliminate odor and bacteria, have leak-proof disposal and are "75 percent more absorbent then other leading brands."
- The current use for this product is to mainly help house train puppies. However, AKC could be marketing to other potential users who house train pets. For example, people are now owning more exotic pets and marketing to this new market could expand product sales and brand knowledge.

COMPETITION

Major competitors:

1. Top Paw
 - Features = has adhesive strips to hold pad in place, puppy attractant, five-layer protection, made only for PetSmart.
 - Positioning strategy = a simple and efficient puppy pad that will help you train your dog quickly and without hassle.
 - Marketing communication = the only form of marketing communications I could find for Top Paw was e-commerce websites. (A photo of the product is attached)

2. Four Paws

- Features = extra large, super-absorbent, odor attraction and eliminates odors
- Positioning strategy = extra-large puppy training pads made for any size dog. Compared to the other brands, Four Paws really stressed the size of their training pads.
- Marketing communication = I couldn't find any examples of marketing communication other than e-commerce websites selling the product. (A photo of the product is attached.)

3. Nature's Miracle

- Features = Moisture- activated fragrance release guards odor and attracts dogs, helps prevent wet paws with rapid fluid absorption, quilted top with leak-proof liner, effective fluid absorption, made in the USA
- Positioning strategy = an odor- free and mess-free alternative to house training your dog. This brand seems to really emphasize their fresh scent and ability to keep consumer's houses odor-free.
- Marketing communication = they are heavy on e-commerce like the other brands, but they have an advertisement as well. (Ad attached)

TARGET

- The current targets for AKC puppy training pads are people who are new dog owners or people who want to house train their dogs.
- The consumer problem that AKC puppy pads are solving is both physical and emotional. When a consumer buys a dog they usually hate the hassle that comes along with training. AKC helps solve the problem by offering reliable, simple ways to house break your new dog. The emotional benefit comes from the relief of stress that comes along with training.
- Target motivation is the need for an aid that will help them train their dogs. They don't want a mess and they want the process to be simple.
- A potential new target segment could be people who own other pets that need to be house broken. Consumers are buying more exotic pets and AKC could market to this target audience by making their training pads more open to animals besides dogs.

INTERACTION

1. Interaction between product and competition:

- Compared to its competition AKC puppy pads doesn't stand very high in the market. Each of the other competitor brands have a USP guiding their strategy. But AKC isn't even sold in stores and is not among one of the first brands that pop up in the consumer's head when they think about buying puppy pads. However, AKC does have the advantage of the name that stands behind it. The American Kennel Club is a highly prestigious and historical name. They could use this to their advantage when being compared to the other puppy pads.
- The image of Top Paw and Four Paws is more fun and cute in comparison to AKC. This is an advantage to AKC because their packaging and image looks more top-quality. AKC's main competition in regards to image would be Nature's Miracle. They also uphold the image of being high quality and their packaging looks more top shelf.
- There isn't much to compare in regards to marketing communication. Both AKC and the competitor brands are sold through e-commerce. However, the other brands are sold in stores compared to AKC, which is not. The other brands are also easier to find through e-commerce while you really have to search to find AKC.

2. Interaction between target and product:

- Each AKC target segment's relationship with the brand is actually not much of a relationship at all. The only people who currently use or have used the puppy pads are loyal customers who know the brand works, or people who decide to try AKC puppy pads on a whim. The bottom line is that puppy pads are somewhat of an unsought product. People only go to buy them when they get a new dog. And usually, they go to the store. AKC's problem is that they are not even sold in stores, so target audiences have almost no way to have a relationship with the product.
- There weren't many customer reviews for the product. On Amazon AKC puppy pads have a five-star review. But that is only from one user. The buyer said they thought it was "perfect" for their dogs and they "loved the scent."
- The current message for the target is: a puppy pad that is reliable, efficient and backed by the prestigious AKC name.
- I could not find a negative review for the puppy pads. The one other review I found was positive and the buyer seemed to be satisfied with product.

3. Interaction between target and competition:

- Top Paw = the consumer reviews on Petsmart's website showed that consumers are generally satisfied with the Top Paw brand. Some of the reviews said they liked how absorbent Top Paw is for how cheap they got them. One of the dislikes of Top Paw was that not absorbent at all and they don't stick to the floors easily. The reviews are somewhat contradictory. Overall, consumers gave them a four-star review.
- Four Paws = consumer reviews on Petco's website showed consumers are also satisfied with the Four Paws brand. The good reviews stated the pads were high quality and large in size. One of the dislikes of Four Paws was that they didn't attract the dogs or the dogs ignored the pads all together. Overall, consumers gave this brand four and half out of five stars.
- Nature's Miracle = consumer reviews showed consumers feel this brand is just OK. The good reviews stated the pads were highly absorbent. Some of the dislikes of Nature's Miracle puppy pads is that consumers said their puppies did not take to using the pads very well and chewed them up. There were only about six reviews. Overall, consumers gave Nature's Miracle four stars.

After researching, I would say AKC's biggest competition is Four Paws puppy pads. They are the most well-known brand and they satisfy consumers. However, I think if AKC boosted advertising and brought the brand into stores, they would be able to beat the competition. The AKC name that sticks behind the brand is a huge advantage for them, but they may be little expensive compared to the other pads.

CONCLUSION

AKC puppy training pads need to change their distribution. They are not in stores and are hard to find through e-commerce. They also are somewhat expensive compared to other more popular brands. This could pose as an issue if they ever want to break into the market.

The brand should keep their same target of new dog owners, who want to buy a prestigious and trusted name. However, they have the opportunity to expand their target market by aiming for people who are trying to house train other pets besides dogs.

AKC has a lot to change about their strategy— if a strategy even exists for their product. So their first step would be to make target markets more aware of the product.

SOURCES:

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